

## Children, War, and Displacement: An Award Contest for Reviews of Children's Books

The Russian invasion of Ukraine displaced thousands of young people, bringing them suddenly into a war. This is not the first such disruption in recent history. Many children, in many places, have lost their normal and safe lives – or have grown up without normalcy or safety. In recent decades, the Philosophy for Children community has tried to engage these young people, to give them, and their adult allies, ways of doing philosophical inquiry to take account of these terrible events.

Recently, Yuliia Kravchenko, the Head of the Critical Thinking Development Lab in the Junior Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, asked for suggestions and volunteers to support English-speaking children and teachers in the current crisis through Zoom meetings, using Philosophy for Children discussion strategies. (Her suggestion form is located [here](#).) As one contribution to this effort, the editors of the weblog [Thinking in Stories: Reviewing Philosophy in Children's Literature](#), hosted by the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) at Montclair State University, seek reviews identifying books for children and young adults that contribute helpfully to their thinking and resilience in situations of war and displacement. We realize that such materials might have uses in many situations where children and adults have suffered catastrophic loss; we hope the list we assemble will be used in many ways.

The challenge is complex. It is not hard to find materials that present the suffering of refugees to those who are relatively comfortable – and that matters. But we are trying to find materials that will help those **undergoing** this disruption to make sense of their experience and to persist as intact, thoughtful people despite suffering and loss. One might think first of books that picture refugees and displaced persons, and those are candidates for this bibliography, but some books that don't directly address the refugee crisis may also open important, supportive conversations. Literature from past refugee crises and past wars may also address the current crises well. The Open Library, and other internet resources, make such older books available, at least for use as read-aloud books.

Matthew Lipman's words from an interview in *Socrates for Six-Year-Olds* express the kind of support for children in difficult circumstances that we hope will animate this effort. He is not solving their problems, or telling them how to feel. He reminds children of the power they always have:

Children don't have much private property. Perhaps they own their clothes and a few toys. It's hard to say that they own even their bed or the furniture in their rooms that belong to the family or the parents. And so, the kind of security that comes with the ownership of property is usually not permitted to children. On the other hand, they do have their thoughts, and they cherish these. They are proud of these. These are very consoling. They are what [children] can be secretive about, and no one else can invade this privacy. And they have the use of language, which gives them a great deal of power; because with words they can talk to one another and communicate with one another, but also, they can defend themselves. I think words mean power to children, and having thoughts is a source of richness—perhaps the only source of richness. (BBC 1990)

Identifying promising materials is just an early step toward connecting with children and teachers. Once there is a decent bibliography, educators can explore making copies available, getting acceptable translations, and otherwise providing the necessary tools for fruitful philosophic interaction across distances.

To get this started, the editors of [Thinking in Stories](#) announce an award contest, with a very tight deadline, for reviews of suitable books. A top prize of \$200 will be awarded to the winning review; up to five prizes of \$100 each will be awarded to reviews with the next-highest rankings, and *all publishable reviews will be published in the weblog*. Books in any language may be reviewed, but the submission must include an English version of the review.

- **Timeline:**
    - Submission deadline (to [iapc@montclair.edu](mailto:iapc@montclair.edu)): May 1, 2022
    - Contest winners notified: May 31, 2022
  - **Length:** 700—1,000 words
  - **Style Guide:** Submissions must comply with the [Thinking in Stories Guidelines](#)
  - **Judging Criteria:** Reviews will be judged on three criteria:
    - (1) the relevance of the book to the theme of ‘Children, War, and Displacement’ –How does this book contribute to children’s thoughtful engagement with their troubles and support them in maintain their spirit and integrity?
    - (2) the quality of the philosophical analysis of the book – How does this book contribute to understanding and coping with difficult situations, in direct or indirect ways?
    - (3) the quality of the writing – How well does the review make the case for this book as a contribution to the work of supporting young people’s thinking in times of distress?
- Note:** Because our project is to assemble a bibliography of usable books for this and future crises, the **choice** of book (and the range of choices within the list) matters, as does the argument in the review. Judges will, when possible, look at the book being reviewed as well as the reviewers’ comments. Since the principal judges have limited language skills beyond English, English language books readily available will have an advantage in the judging process.
- **Eligibility:** There are no constraints: people of any age and academic preparation may submit

Books reviewed may be picture books, chapter books, young adult novels and nonfiction narratives, or graphic novels / nonfiction narratives. Contestants should check that the book they want to review has not already been reviewed in [Thinking in Stories](#) or in the two other websites devoted to philosophy in children’s literature: [Philosophy and Children’s Literature](#) (University of Washington Center for Philosophy for Children) and [Teaching Children Philosophy](#) (Prindle Institute for Ethics at DuPauw University).

Please share this contest announcement widely, with philosophers, educators, librarians, and graduate students familiar with philosophy for children.

**Call for Contest Judges:** If you have expertise in children’s / YA literature—particularly on themes relevant to this contest and/or experience philosophizing with children on these themes, and wish to support this initiative by being a judge, please contact [iapc@montclair.edu](mailto:iapc@montclair.edu).

*This Award Contest is sponsored by the IAPC, the Department of Educational Foundations, and the College of Education and Human Services at Montclair State University.*